

WHAT IS AN EXEMPTION?

As used in the context of real estate taxes, an exemption is a release from the obligation to pay all or a portion of the taxes assessed on a parcel of property. Exemptions are conferred by the state legislature (Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 59, Section 5) on particular categories of persons or property. The categories of persons on whom exemptions are conferred, for their primary domicile and subject to certain qualifications, are listed below, together with an explanation of the eligibility requirements for each. Exemptions are not abatements in that they do not affect the valuation of the property, but simply reduce the taxes owed.

APPLICATIONS

Applications are available from the assessors' office in the basement of the Town Hall or from any other Massachusetts assessors' office. An application must be filed with the assessors, each year, within three months of the mailing date of the actual tax bill. With the quarterly billing system, the third bill, customarily mailed on or about January 1, is the first actual bill and it is at this time that the exemption applications are to be filed. The filing of the exemption application does not stay the collection of the tax, which should be paid as assessed. An exemption, even if received in prior years, is not automatically conferred but must be specifically acted upon by the Board of Assessors. The assessors' action is discretionary only insofar as they determine that an applicant, according to the documentation he or she provides, does or does not meet the eligibility requirements. Notice of the assessors' action will be sent to each applicant.

Veterans who have received an exemption in previous years by simply signing a veteran's card in the assessors' office will find the process different from previous years. Due to a ruling by the state Department of Revenue, veterans will need to complete and submit an application, as is the practice for other exemptions. If the assessors have an applicant's certificate of disability on file, it is not necessary to resubmit a copy, except in the case of a 100% disability where the certificate must be submitted with the application every year.

DOCUMENTATION

As exemptions are granted only for the primary residence, and as some exemptions are age dependent and/or means tested, an applicant must provide whatever information the assessors deem to be reasonably required to establish eligibility. The information that an applicant may be requested to furnish includes, but is not limited to: (1) birth certificates, (2) evidence of domicile and occupancy, (3) income tax returns and bank statements.

EXEMPTIONS

Clause 17D - Surviving Spouse/Minor Child or Elderly Person

Amount: \$350

Eligibility: As of July 1 of the tax year, an individual must be either (1) a surviving spouse or surviving minor child who owns and occupies the property as his or her domicile; or (2) a person at least 70 years old who has owned and occupied the property as her or her domicile for at least the five preceding years.

Income: There are no income guidelines for Clause 17D.

Whole Estate: The applicant's whole estate (cash, bank balances, stocks, bonds, some types of personal property, etc.) excluding the value of the domicile (up to three living units), cannot exceed \$40,000.

Clause 22 - Veterans

Amount: From \$800 to a full exemption, depending on the nature and extent of disability

Eligibility: As of July 1 of the tax year, an individual must have lived in Massachusetts for at least the five preceding years or must have been domiciled in Massachusetts for at least six months prior to entering the service and must be either (1) a veteran or spouse (or his or her surviving spouse who remains unmarried) who has a service connected disability of at least ten percent (as verified by the Veterans Administration); or (2) a veteran or spouse (or his or her surviving

spouse who remains unmarried) who was awarded the Purple Heart; or (3) the parent of a

serviceman who lost his or her life during wartime.

Income: There are no income guidelines for Clause 22.

Whole Estate: There are no whole estate guidelines for Clause 22.

Clause 37A - Blind Persons

Amount: \$1000

Eligibility: As of July 1 of the tax year, an individual who is blind must own the property and occupy it as his or her primary domicile. A certificate of blindness from the Commission for the Blind must be provided annually with the application for exemption.

Income: There are no income guidelines for Clause 37A.

Whole Estate: There are no whole estate guidelines for Clause 37A.

Clause 41A - Tax Deferral

Amount: Any or all of the taxes assessed may be deferred (not exempted), with interest, until such time as the property is sold or transferred, or until the demise of the owner, at which point the taxes and interest must be paid. The cumulative total of the taxes deferred cannot exceed fifty percent of the applicant's share of the assessed value of the property. Entry into tax deferral creates a lien on the property, which is recorded by the Town at the Registry of Deeds.

Eligibility: As of July 1 of the tax year, an individual must be at least 65 years old, must have owned and occupied the property for at least the five preceding years, and must have been continuously domiciled in Massachusetts for at least the ten preceding years.

Income: The applicant's gross receipts from all sources in the year preceding the application cannot have exceeded \$40,000.

Whole Estate: There are no whole estate guidelines for Clause 41A.

Clause 41C - Elderly

Amount: \$1000

Eligibility: As of July 1 of the tax year, an individual must be at least 70 years old, must have owned and occupied the property for at least the five preceding years, and must have been domiciled in Massachusetts for a least the ten preceding years.

Income: The applicants gross receipts from all sources in the year preceding the application cannot have exceeded \$20,000 if single; \$30,000 if married.

Whole Estate: The applicant's whole estate, excluding the value of the domicile (up to three living units) cannot exceed \$40,000 if single; \$55,000 if married.

Clause 42 - Surviving Spouse (Clause 43 - Minor Children) of a Fire Fighter or Police Officer Killed in the Line of Duty

Amount: Full exemption

Eligibility: As of July 1 of the tax year, an individual must be a surviving spouse or minor child of a fire fighter or police officer who was killed in the line of duty, must remain unmarried, and must own and occupy the property.

Income: There are no income guidelines for Clause 42 or Clause 43.

Whole Estate: There are no whole estate guidelines for Clause 42 or 43.

With the exception of Clause 41A, the tax deferral, which can be combined with Clause 41C, the elderly exemption, it is not possible to apply for more than one exemption in the same fiscal year.

For additional information, please contact the Assessors' Office at Town Hall, or telephone (781) 275-0046.

